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WEINBERGER, SENATE PANEL DISCUSS UNIFIED U.S. INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY
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WASHINGTON

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger met Thursday with the Senate Intelligence Committee to discuss development of a unified U.S. policy regarding what he called the much maligned but vital business of intelligence gathering.

After a 90-minute session behind closed doors Weinberger called the meeting constructive and useful.

He added that "intelligence frequently has been considered to be the kind of an unmentionable topic that somehow is a dirty business.

"Unfortunately, in the world in which we live it is a vital business," Weinberger said, "vital to our survival."

Committee chairman David Durenberger, R-Minn., said Thursday was the first time the panel had met with a defense secretary in its nine-year history.

One subject that did not come up was the current Navy spy case, in which four men have been charged with passing military secrets to the Soviet Union. Weinberger has described the case as causing serious damage to U.S. national security.

Durenberger said the Walker case deliberately was not discussed. He said it would be addressed later as part of a separate review of counter-intelligence efforts aimed at blocking Soviet efforts to recruit U.S. spies.

Durenberger has pressed the panel to come up with an overall intelligence strategy which would end disputes among the various intelligence agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency.

"A long-range strategy would have pinpointed the difficulties that we inherited in Central America," said Durenberger. "The shortfalls that we have experienced in our intelligence abilities in this vital section of the world might not have occurred in the first place or might have been anticipated and planned for."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the panel's vice-chairman, said there had been "a great deal of concern expressed" by congressmen in recent years about "the quality of our intelligence (and) how we plan."

The meeting came a day after the Democratic-controlled House reversed itself and voted to renew aid to U.S.-backed Contras fighting the leftist Nicaraguan government.

Undersecretary of State Michael Armacost also met with the panel, but his testimony was interrupted by a vote on the Senate floor and will continue at a later time.